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Loose Words, Not Nukes

The Impact of U.S. Nuclear Force Structure Debate on NATO Perceptions of Extended
Deterrence

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BIOGRAPHY

Colonel Klopotek was commissioned in 1990 from the United States Air Force Academy. Following Undergraduate Pilot Training, he spent two years as a flight line maintenance officer in both support and generation Officer-in-Charge capacities. His flying assignments included duties as an instructor pilot, flight commander, squadron and wing weapons officers, wing standardization and evaluation flight examiner, operations officer and fighter squadron commander. He is a distinguished graduate of the Aircraft Maintenance/Munitions Officers Course and Squadron Officer's School, and graduate of the National Security Studies program at the Naval Postgraduate School. Colonel Klopotek is a command pilot with more than 1900 flying hours including over 200 F-16 combat hours. He most recently served as the Deputy Executive Officer to the Combatant Commander, U.S. Africa Command, and is presently attending the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

ABSTRACT

America appears poised to redefine its extended deterrent commitment to NATO. This paper evaluates a selection of U.S. signals surrounding the slow-burning debate on the future of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW) in Europe to determine a prevailing European understanding of the American NSNW policy preference. Despite the conspicuous silence in American intellectual and foreign policy circles defining what President Obama's Global Nuclear Zero commitment means to the future of NATOs NSNW, the most consistent thread among U.S. actions and rhetoric is an American perception of a changed threat environment. The result is a deliberate policy vector that reinterprets deterrence and intellectually relegates NSNW to the dustbin of history as a dangerous Cold War relic. This intent is interpreted by European allies through the prism of flexible response strategy resulting in a loss of commitment perception, linked to historical perceptions of graduated deterrence. The U.S. has had difficulty communicating and convincing our NATO allies to accept and adopt this strategic recasting because American policy elites have thus far failed to offer a compelling theoretical construct that continues to extend historically understood security assurances. This has caused the beginning of a reexamination of core alliance functions, potentially undermining the strength of consultative norms and shared purpose.

INTRODUCTION

America appears poised to redefine its extended deterrent commitment to NATO.

President Obama committed the United States to actively pursuing the goal of a world without nuclear weapons in his lauded April 2009 Prague address. NATO allies and U.S. defense planners alike have doubtless been reexamining their security relationships as actions supporting an accelerated American policy goal of nuclear weapons reductions are contemplated, yet both U.S. and NATO declaratory nuclear strategy remains steadfastly grounded in cold war expressions of extended deterrence commitments. European elites and alliance think tanks have been cranking out a growing stream of contemplative studies grappling with the near-term implications of a denuclearized force structure, in stark contrast to a conspicuous silence in American intellectual and foreign policy circles where “there is a general tendency in official statements to push the potential role of nuclear weapons as instruments of security policy further into the background.”¹

This paper examines American and NATO dual-capable delivery systems and the Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW) stockpile as a case study in surveying intended and unintended signals conveyed by U.S. policy rhetoric and force posture. The absence of any substantive U.S. nuclear policy discourse leaves our European allies to deduce the meaning behind U.S. policy statements and actions; their perceptual prisms result in three possible explanations: 1) an American reinterpretation of deterrence that relies solely on strategic capabilities, recasting NSNW as wholly inconsequential to deterrence calculus; 2) a decision to recapitalize conventionally, shifting extended deterrence assurance from a principally nuclear-

¹ Ian Anthony and Johnny Janssen, “The Future of Nuclear Weapons in NATO,” electronic article available from the *Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung* (Berlin, Germany, April 2010), pg 12. Note this observation was made in a European journal.

based threat to incorporate formidable U.S. conventional military capabilities and making NSNW useful only as stockpile bargaining chips for future nuclear arms reduction efforts; 3) or merely a series of unintended signals based on programming decisions made at the bureaucratic level seeking a strategic explanation.

This paper evaluates a selection of U.S. signals surrounding the slow-burning debate on the future of NSNW in Europe to determine a prevailing European understanding of the American NSNW policy preference. I begin with a review of the contemporary European conception of extended deterrence, then survey six recent American NSNW-related signals to determine the spectrum of likely meanings the U.S. is conveying to European NATO allies. The third section assesses the aggregate impact of these disparate signals is an emerging European belief in the shifting American interpretation of extended deterrence that relies solely on strategic capabilities; this adversely impacts European commitment perceptions. I consider in the fourth section the underlying motivations of this perceived change in U.S. nuclear deterrence strategy and find the most consistent thread among U.S. actions and rhetoric is an American perception of a changed threat environment. The result is a deliberate policy vector that reinterprets deterrence and intellectually relegates NSNW to the dustbin of history as a dangerous Cold War relic. The U.S. has had difficulty communicating and convincing our NATO allies to accept and adopt this strategic recasting because American policy elites have thus far failed to offer a compelling theoretical construct that continues to extend historically understood security assurances. I conclude by recommending a focused American nuclear posture dialog with NATO to arrive at a shared new strategic narrative necessary to maintain alliance vitality.

EUROPEAN SECURITY PERCEPTIONS

The present political context European NATO members assess and interpret American statements and actions is rooted in the historical framework of flexible response strategy. NATO refined its dissuasive threat in the 1960s under the theoretical concept of ‘flexible response,’ intended to develop a range of integrated conventional and non-strategic nuclear responses in its military capabilities to produce ‘escalation dominance’ as understood through the theoretical prism of rational choice dissuasion logic. Rational choice deterrence theorists like Robert Powell argue that an effective nuclear deterrent requires a state to devise a range of threats that can rationally be executed: the idea of a Boolean suicidal nuclear exchange as the only response to aggression is incredible, but confronting an aggressor with a series of threats in an unfolding process of *controlled escalation* to demonstrate determination is rational and believable.²

The operative logic of ‘flexible response’ was to enhance dissuasive credibility by creating a range of retaliatory capabilities in an effort to tailor threats to perceived challenges and menacing aggressors. The force structure and theoretical model formed to support ‘flexible response’ remain the core inherited vestiges of the NATO military alliance today, and notably include the deliberate integration of ‘dual-use’ weapons platforms (military hardware that can employ both conventional and nuclear munitions). Robert McNamara identified “three quite contradictory and mutually exclusive views of the military role of nuclear weapons” as the alliance first deliberated adopting ‘flexible response’ policy that continue to influence European

² Thomas Schelling proposed an parallel notion of ‘graduated deterrence,’ based on ‘active’ defensive measures (not merely threat of force) following initial hostilities where dissuasion is communicated by threat of progressive retaliation that make the adversary challenge too costly, inducing him not to proceed. Both the theory and policy implementation of ‘flexible response’ strategy was intended to include conventional military capabilities along with a range of nuclear options along the spectrum of escalation of coercive violence. See Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1966), and Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

NSNW perceptions: 1) a nuclear exchange can remain limited by exerting increasing punishment confined to military targets under escalation dominance (as predicted in the realist understanding of rational choice); 2) any use of nuclear weapons is likely to lead to uncontrollable escalation, and therefore these weapons have no military utility other than deterrence; 3) although uncontrollable escalation is likely to occur following any limited initiation, the threat of their use enhances NATOs deterrent credibility (termed the contingently unsafe actor dynamic by Goldstein).³

NATO leaders are grappling with long-standing perceptual linkages between alliance credibility and nuclear weapons capability as expressed by Robert McNamara when he first proposed a graduated deterrence theory, with many publicly expressing their belief that the only contemporary purpose of these weapons is to serve as a deterrent to conflict. The internal debate on the validity and utility of continued reliance on an escalation dominance strategy first embraced in Cold War policy is revealed by the NATO academic Diaspora, triggered by the absence of a specified threat to an expressly formed defensive military alliance. European academics openly question an expanded alliance's ability to arrive at any future nuclear use decision (which must be unanimously taken under the NAC consultative framework), exposing a structural weakness in NATO nuclear dissuasion commitment credibility.⁴

³ See Robert McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons: Perceptions and Misperceptions," in *The Nuclear Reader: Strategy, Weapons, War, 2nd edition*. Edited by Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pg 174. Avery Goldstein described the logic of nations that rationally accept institutional mechanisms that may result in uncontrollable escalation in the belief there must be an irrevocable structural element of uncertainty to insure unpredictability and overcome basic human survival instincts facing the leadership of the hypothetical defending nation, who would otherwise back down from the nuclear precipice in a final act of rationality. See Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pg 28.

⁴ See Karl-Heinz Kamp, "NATOs Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Beyond 'Yes' or 'No,'" *NATO Defense College*, research division paper no.61, (Rome: September 2010), pg 5.

A broad rift between new NATO accessions and original member nations has emerged over the continuing relevance of a nuclear deterrent. The predictable division lines between new NATO members who “still harbor concerns with regard to a potential Russian aggression” and ‘Old Europe’ elites who broadly advocate NSNW withdrawal veils a more sophisticated debate that recalls original interpretations of graduated deterrence logic anchored in rational choice theory.⁵ American national security policy has always emphasized nuclear nonproliferation, and some NATO member elites remain fearful of an American perspective that links removal of NSNW from Europe to proliferation pressures that may compel some nations to seek organic deterrent capabilities.⁶

European policy pundits openly worry over any decision to alter the legacy NSNW force structure: “...some governments believe the weapons should now be removed altogether. Others in the Alliance are worried that if one or two countries remove them unilaterally, not only will the principle of nuclear burden-sharing between the US and the Europeans be compromised but

⁵ Kamp is the lead researcher at NATO Defense College. He highlights anti-withdrawal rhetoric from eastern NATO members following the February 2010 ‘Common Letter’ to the NATO Secretary General, where Germany, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands called for discussions to reduce the role of nuclear weapons. The rejection of any attempts to reduce the relevance of nuclear deterrence (led by France) is steeped in escalation dominance logic targeted principally at Russian nuclear force structure and posture. Kamp estimates Russia maintains between 3000-5000 NSNW along its European borders; 10-15 Times the number of NATO weapons. See Karl-Heinz Kamp, “NATOs Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Beyond ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

This schism is not lost on American analysts. Walter B. Slocombe and Annette Heuser highlight alliance tensions evident to Americans: “Several NATO allies, including Germany, seek to distance themselves from nuclear weapons by, among other measures, ending the current nuclear sharing arrangements. In contrast, some of NATO’s new members perceive Russian territorial aggression as a continued threat and view proposed reductions in the Alliance’s nuclear presence, nuclear missions or nuclear reliance as a weakening of the overall NATO security commitment and a danger to their own security.” See Walter B. Slocombe and Annette Heuser, “NATO’s Nuclear Policy in 2010: Issues and Options,” *Atlantic Council Strategic Advisor Group Issue Brief*, (Washington, D. C., 12 March 2010).

⁶ Karl-Heinz Kamp highlights a long-standing European belief that the American perception of the European nuclear umbrella served the implicit function of averting allied development of their own nuclear deterrent forces. See Karl-Heinz Kamp, “NATOs Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Beyond ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

Ian Anthony and Johnny Janssen perhaps inadvertently underscore the point that NATO proliferation concerns are primarily an American obsession, by citing U.S. Secretaries of Energy, Defense and State statements on linkage of U.S. extended deterrent commitment and non-proliferation. The authors suggest a more likely European response to removal of NSNW from Europe might be the development of more robust civilian nuclear programs that could be adapted to military purposes in the event of a security crisis. See Ian Anthony and Johnny Janssen, “The Future of Nuclear Weapons in NATO,” pg 28.

so too will the transatlantic link and the overall quality of collective defence commitments within NATO.”⁷ For the moment, European elites agree on the continuing political value of the presence of NSNW as a symbol of alliance cohesion and purpose underwritten by the institutions created to foster nuclear consultation and commitment assurance.

U.S. SIGNALS TO NATO

U.S. declaratory policy supports the NATO position but equivocates, leaving Europeans unsure about our future intentions and alliance security guarantees based on the framework of flexible response based graduated deterrence.⁸ This section will examine six American actions in the context of current national security policy to assess likely European interpretations of recent signals : 1) formal U.S policy enumerating unilateral force reprioritization and focus; 2) complementary decision to distance the U.S. from legacy NATO ‘first-use’ declaratory policy; 3) sanctioned musings about strategic nuclear force structure and sufficiency; 4) benign neglect of dual-capable tactical aircraft supporting the NATO NSNW architecture; 5) official determination to modernize the B-61 nuclear gravity bomb, but lack of resolute funding advocacy; 6) and intent to negotiate bilateral reductions in NSNW with Russia. These signaling actions have occurred in an environment bereft of enumerated strategy and are seemingly independent acts lacking

⁷ David Owen, Des Brown, and Malcolm Rifkind. “NATO Must Lead on Nuclear Disarmament,” Electronic article posted online by the *European Leadership Network for Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Non-proliferation*, 16 February 2011.

⁸ While the American aim is “reducing the role of nuclear weapons in our national security approach,” The 2010 National Security Strategy maintains “as long as any nuclear weapons exist, the United States will sustain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal, both to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other security partners that they can count on American security commitments.” See Presidential Executive Document, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C., May 2010), pg 23. Does this specify commitment to NSNW, NATOs remaining U.K. and French nuclear forces, or shifting reliance to U.S. strategic nuclear capabilities? Steve Larsen addresses this ambiguity by noting, “It is important to remember, of course, that since three of its members have independent atomic arsenals, as long as NATO survives as a political institution it will remain a *de facto* nuclear alliance.” See Jeffrey A. Larsen, “Future Options for NATO Nuclear Policy,” *Atlantic Council Strategic Advisor Group Issue Brief*, (Washington, D. C., 30 August 2011), pg 4.

theoretical cohesion, leaving European policy elites to attempt to deduce American intentions among the three explanations postulated in the introduction.

Formal American policy documents intentionally downplay the role of nuclear capabilities. Current U.S. strategy documents obliquely whisper nuclear linkages (if they are mentioned at all): The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) seeks to assure NATO allies of existing security commitments by restating the U.S. commitment to Article V, but carefully couches its language to more narrowly define deterrence relationships along with a soft warning (spoken as an opportunity) to accept any strategic recasting the U.S. may envision.⁹ The National Military Strategy (NMS) of the United States is intended to operationalize the priorities set out in the NSS; but this 24 page document mentions nuclear weapons in one lonely paragraph. The clear emphasis is on conventional capabilities and peacekeeping/stabilization forces, communicating a deliberate American shift toward conventionalization – but not offering an explanation to assuage European security assurance concerns. These concerns are heightened by a range of U.S. actions:

1) Formal U.S policy enumerating unilateral force reprioritization and focus. Defense Secretary Panetta issued new strategic guidance encapsulating President Obama's January 2012 address, emphasizing the deliberate American decision to reprioritize defense efforts. In case the 2010 series of national defense strategy documents veiled U.S. intentions, the document highlighted changing American perceptions of the purpose of the North Atlantic alliance and overtly

⁹ The NSS narrows deterrence to 'vital threats' and casts NATO Strategic Concept discussions as an opportunity to reshape the alliance: "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the pre-eminent security alliance in the world today. With our 27 NATO allies, and the many partners with which NATO cooperates, we will strengthen our collective ability to promote security, *deter vital threats*, and defend our people. NATO's new Strategic Concept *will provide an opportunity to revitalize and reform the Alliance* [emphasis added]. We are committed to ensuring that NATO is able to address the full range of 21st century challenges, while serving as a foundation of European security. And we will continue to anchor our commitment in Article V, which is fundamental to our collective security." Presidential Executive Document, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C., May 2010), pp 41-42.

indicated its new defense priority shift toward the Asia-Pacific region – calling on European allies to embrace recast American strategic focus.¹⁰

2) Decision to distance U.S. from legacy NATO ‘first-use’ declaratory policy. The 2010 NSS and 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance are emblematic of the evolving American perception of the general security role and utility of the NATO military alliance; this changing dynamic is captured in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), Steven Pifer argues Washington’s “adjusted negative security assurance linked to compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty” articulated in NPR emphasizes the deterrent “sole purpose” of nuclear weapons, undercutting the alliance implied nuclear escalatory threat and signaling a U.S. decision to formally distance itself from the legacy (but still operative) NATO first-use declaratory policy.¹¹ The express U.S. distinction exposes a fault line in NATO declaratory nuclear policy eroding allied confidence in its shared nuclear commitment (and perhaps signaling loss of resolve to potential regional challengers).

3) Sanctioned musings about strategic nuclear force structure. Testimonial musings by military officers are illustrative of a wave of domestic mixed signaling language that implies U.S. nuclear retrenchment. While perhaps intended to reinforce resolve and continuity by reiterating American commitment to the nuclear Triad, U.S. Air Force Major General William Chambers (who oversees nuclear issues on the Air Staff) said the Air Force's nuclear-capable B-2A and B-

¹⁰ The Defense Strategic Guidance explains, ‘Most European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it. Combined with the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, this has created a strategic opportunity to rebalance the U.S. military investment in Europe, moving from a focus on current conflicts toward a focus on future capabilities. *In keeping with this evolving strategic landscape, our posture in Europe must also evolve.* As this occurs, the United States will maintain our Article 5 commitments to allied security and promote enhanced capacity and interoperability for coalition operations [original emphasis].’ U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, (Washington, D.C., 5 January 2012), pg 3.

¹¹ Steven Pifer, et al. “U.S. and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges,” *Brookings Arms Control Series* Paper 3, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, May 2010), pg 17. Pifer argues the ‘sole purpose’ language differs subtly but significantly from ‘no first use,’ and future NATO adoption of the American recharacterization faces opposition principally from the other two alliance nuclear powers of France and the U.K.

52H bombers "may emerge as the best means" of extending the United States' protective nuclear umbrella to friends and allies in coming years, especially as US strategic nuclear force levels come down."¹² This perception marks a key break with alliance structural dependence on organic Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) as the visible military mechanism supporting the nuclear deterrent in Europe.¹³

4) Benign neglect of NATO NSNW architecture. NATO DCA-contributing nations are pursuing disparate tactical fighter aircraft acquisitions programs based on national modernization efforts . The German decision to replace aging Tornado dual-capable fighters with non-nuclear capable Eurofighter Typhoons was unchallenged in the alliance; the Netherlands, Denmark, the United States and the United Kingdom appear intent to purchase the F-35 (Belgium is undecided).¹⁴ And though all "are all evaluating future aircraft modernization options, only two -- Italy and the Netherlands -- are considering an alternative that could offer dual capability (F-35)."¹⁵ Defense analysts note the development of dual-capability for the F-35 is questionable, and has not been funded to date – even by the United

¹² Excerpts from remarks made by Maj Gen William Chambers on Capitol Hill on 28 October 2011 as reported in the *Air Force Magazine Online* "Daily Report", 31 October 2011.

Steven Pifer provides another testimonial example: "In April 2010 at a Council of Foreign Relations meeting, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff James Cartwright was asked if he saw a military mission performed by these aircraft-delivered weapons that cannot be performed by either U.S. strategic forces or U.S. conventional forces ; he replied, "no." See Stephen Pifer et al, "U.S. and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges," *Brookings Arms Control Series* Paper 3, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, May 2010), pg 18.

¹³ Major General Chambers broadly (but ambiguously) tempered his remarks, claiming the United States—"remain committed" to providing aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons to support NATO's nuclear mission: "There is nothing currently being considered to undo or change that commitment." Chamber's caveat is replete with historical significance: alliance devolution to DCA platforms as the sole supporting nuclear deterrent capability began in the late Cold War when popular anti-nuclear sympathies combined with economic realities to produce alliance decisions eliminating all NSNW that raised problems of military command and control (such as nuclear artillery munitions); these reductions were followed in the late 1980s by arms control agreements removing theater nuclear ballistic missile systems (IRBMs). This left NATO dual-use fighter aircraft as the sole nuclear weapons system to substantiate its deterrent capability, effectively negating the original logic of 'flexible response' as the motive theory behind NATO force structure and security assurances as understood as part of the U.S. extended deterrence commitment. See *Air Force Magazine Online*, Excerpts from remarks made by Maj Gen William Chambers on Capitol Hill on 28 October 2011.

¹⁴ Ian Anthony and Johnny Janssen, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons in NATO," pg 18-19.

¹⁵ Ibid. Current NATO DCA are: the Tornado IDS (Germany and Italy); the F-16 MLU (Belgium and the Netherlands); and the F-15E and F-16C operated by the U.S.

States (its principal sponsor and designer). This assessment is (perhaps inadvertently) confirmed by the remarks of Major General Chambers during Congressional testimony: “Decisions regarding the integration of a modernized version of the B-61 nuclear bomb on the F-35 strike fighter have slipped to the right due to the F-35's overall schedule delays,” said Chambers. “It is probably not” going to be resolved as part of the Pentagon's Fiscal 2013 to Fiscal 2017 budget program.¹⁶

5) Official decision to renew the B-61 nuclear gravity bomb, but lack of funding advocacy.

The 2010 NPR calls to “retain the capability to forward-deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on tactical fighter-bombers and heavy bombers, and proceed with full scope life extension for the B-61 bomb.”¹⁷ This statement is doubtless intended to reassure NATO allies, but commitment questions raised by uncertain F-35 and B-61 funding blunt their intended effect on European allies.¹⁸ European defense analysts Anthony and Janssen offer a representative negative assessment of the sputtering internal American NSNW force posture discussion: “The outcome may further marginalize short-range, dual-capable delivery systems within the arsenal. If these delivery systems are in the margins of nuclear force planning, their credibility and usefulness may further diminish.”¹⁹

6) Intent to negotiate bilateral reductions in NSNW with Russia. American policy elites have clearly communicated a desire to use the NSNW presence in Europe as a negotiating tool furthering arms reduction efforts with Russia. This preference has been openly expressed through think tank appraisals like Brookings: “The U.S. negotiating position would likely

¹⁶ Excerpts from remarks made by Maj Gen William Chambers on Capitol Hill on 28 October 2011 as reported in the *Air Force Magazine Online* “Daily Report”, 31 October 2011.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, (Washington, D.C., 06 April 2010), pg xii.

¹⁸ The testimonial remarks of Major General Chambers serve once again to underscore NATO allies' perception, when he simply noted there has been “no decision made yet” on the specific course of action for extending the B-61's life.” See Excerpts from remarks made by Maj Gen William Chambers on Capitol Hill on 28 October 2011 as reported in the *Air Force Magazine Online* “Daily Report”, 31 October 2011.

¹⁹ Ian Anthony and Johnny Janssen, “The Future of Nuclear Weapons in NATO, pg 3.

seek reductions to equal levels, parity being a fundamental principle of U.S.-Russian arms negotiations.”²⁰ The U.S. has carefully couched this goal to include NATO consultation in formal policy expression, and conveyed this intent at the foreign ministers’ meeting in Tallinn, Estonia in April 2010.²¹ This nod to the consultative norms ensconced in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group may simultaneously convey the enduring strength of alliance ties and weaken the credibility of its collective nuclear deterrent, by communicating their contemporary irrelevance in signaling a willingness to bargain this capability away.

LIKELY EUROPEAN INTERPRETATIONS

Assessing the range of American actions surveyed above using a signaling framework highlights their tendency to adversely impact European commitment perceptions, especially those linked to perceptions of graduated deterrence.²² American military and bureaucratic preferences reflected in the benign neglect of DCA architecture substantially detract from alliance Article V credibility, understood by Europeans to be underwritten by nuclear weapons.²³

²⁰ Pifer explains American motivations: “U.S. leverage to encourage the Russians toward such an outcome might come from two sources. First, Russia has traditionally sought the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe and suggested that nuclear arms be based only on national territory. The presence of U.S. tactical weapons in Europe thus could have value as a negotiating chip. Second, the United States will likely have a numerical advantage over Russia in terms of non-deployed strategic warheads as the New START Treaty is implemented. If these were put on the table along with tactical nuclear arms, negotiations might trade off one side’s advantage for the others in a negotiation.” See Stephen Pifer et al, “U.S. and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges,” pg 27.

²¹ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said at the conclusion of the meeting that the United States “was not opposed to reductions in the number of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe, but the removal of these weapons should be linked to a reduction in the number of Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons. Moreover, according to a NATO spokesman, the foreign ministers had agreed that no nuclear weapons would be removed from Europe unless all 28 member states of NATO agreed.” See Amy Woolf, “Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons,” (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 2, 2011), pg 25.

²² See the coding matrix in appendix for a subjective analysis.

²³ George and Smoke identify three basic patterns of deterrence failure: Fait Accompli Attempts (where the challenger does not believe in credible commitment/capability by a defending power); Limited Probe (aggressor creates a controlled crisis to test/clarify a defender’s commitment); and Controlled Pressure (where the initiating side understands the defender’s commitment but regards this as ‘soft’ or dependent on limited/unusable capabilities). This last pattern is most likely describes the predominant concern status-quo minded European policy-makers may have if NSNW are removed from Europe, reinforced by the theoretical understanding that “States must be sufficiently engaged by what is at stake in the area or country in question. Commitments which rest on relatively weak national motivation are more likely to be challenged.” See Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke,

The American alternative to altering the successful status-quo deterrence construct that has served NATO so faithfully is differentiated by positive inducements, reflecting the national character and liberal outlook that is the well spring of U.S. foreign policy. Theorists George and Smoke identify a typology labeled ‘inducement theory’ (positive influence strategies intended over a long time horizon).²⁴ This typology may well describe Obama administration efforts to create a positive international environment under a context of ‘Global Zero’ to incentivize nuclear arms reductions/non-proliferation regimes. These elements are embedded in the 2010 NSS, but are likely perceived by eastern European members as an abrogation of the American extended deterrence guarantee, complicating the U.S. goal of alliance reassurance.²⁵

The tepid U.S. DCA appropriations effort may confirm to alliance allies the peripheral importance of NSNW to American policy. European policy makers may be predisposed to this perception, based on previous actions by U.S. military elements in NATO. The U.S. military (principally the Air Force), formerly a champion of force structure and training activities supporting European NSNW architecture, appears to have lost interest in the nuclear mission.²⁶ And at the very time the U.S. force contributing component of NATO was arguing

Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp 534 – 548. Quotation taken from pg 560.

²⁴This is seen by George and Smoke as a supplement to deterrence when pursued in conjunction with ‘negative influence’ policies. They distinguish between short-term inducement efforts (aimed at crisis prevention incentives) and long-term ‘coupling’ positive commitments. *Ibid*, pg 607.

²⁵ Many western European nations are receptive to American inducements seeking to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons. Jana Perna writes, “Strategically, the weapons have little real value in the post-Cold War climate. They are vulnerable to a rogue or terrorist attack, too small or risky for independent use, and unpopular with military forces and most political audiences.” Perna acknowledges “...it is open truth that some members joined [the] transatlantic system of collective defence primarily because of [a] promised American nuclear shield, not because of fulfillment of the Treaty’s values and political virtues. Some claim that anxieties of those member states are eroding the alliance’s political cohesion and its solidarity, especially in that time, when some are consequently seeking bilateral security assurances from Washington in the form of U.S. bases on their territory.” See Jana Perna, “Getting to Nuclear Zero: Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe as Starting Point,” *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Center for International Relations* (Warsaw Poland, 1 March 2011), pg 14 and pg 18.

²⁶ A 2008 report to the Secretary of Defense found, “U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)...no longer advocates for these weapons and no longer recognizes a political role for these weapons in NATO.” See Amy Woolf, “Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons,” (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 14, 2010), pg 21.

for an “over the horizon” deterrent posture, the military experienced a very public erosion of competence and confidence following a series of nuclear surety gaffes in 2007; this mission fatigue was manifested in critical internal reviews conducted in 2008 of nuclear surety and security practices of NSNW stored in Europe.²⁷ Together, these actions add a palpable sense of uncertainty to the American commitment to NATO’s non-strategic nuclear mission and fuel a European loss of confidence over nuclear weapons security.

The prevailing position of many European elites reflects their belief there is no purposeful attempt to forge a new security framework, as expressed by Brookings analyst Stefen Pifer. “NATO currently is on a path of disarmament by default as regards its non-strategic nuclear weapons. If the Alliance does not handle the nuclear issue carefully, it will find that U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe are reduced or eliminated while NATO gains nothing in terms of reductions of Russian non-strategic nuclear warheads or in terms of political credit for a unilateral decision to end the U.S. nuclear presence. The default decision is driven primarily by the future of NATO’s dual-capable aircraft.”²⁸

ROOTS OF EVOLVING AMERICAN SECURITY PERCEPTIONS

Yet this vector indicated most visibly by the benign neglect of alliance DCA does not necessarily portend the end to NATO nuclear assurances and consultative norms. The panoply of American signals surveyed above cannot fail to communicate a U.S. desire to move beyond the escalation dominance model adopted in the Cold War; the range of possible European interpretations indicates a lack of allied understanding of contemporary U.S. strategic thinking.

²⁷ Ibid, pg 21.

²⁸ Steven Pifer et al, “NATO, Nuclear Weapons, and Arms Control,” pg 3. Pifer contends the German decision not to replace its dual-capable aircraft will cause cascading effects on Dutch and Belgian decisions, by removing the rationale (under the nuclear burden sharing regime) to replace their aging F-16s. He writes, “according to Dutch diplomats...[purchasing nuclear capable F-35s] would be virtually impossible if it is clear that the German Air Force is getting out of the nuclear business.” This quotation from pg 21.

What European leaders need to maintain confidence in American security commitments is a framework explaining underlying U.S. motivations. I propose three animating forces: 1) American perceptions of a changed threat environment; 2) Conventionalization based on domestic pressures; 3) Conventionalization based on generational inculcation of the ‘nuclear taboo and non-proliferation regimes; and 4) Ignorance – simply the loss of theoretical and historical understanding of deterrence in U.S. foreign policy elites. U.S. declaratory policy documents and continued sensitivity to NATO consultative norms and collective security assurance guarantees indicate at least a passable institutional memory obviating this possibility from serious consideration. Each of the first three offer greater explanatory power to European leaders seeking to understand and interpret American policy rhetoric and actions.

1) American perceptions of a changed threat environment. American policy elites have sought to translate the unexpected victory over Soviet communism into a tangible security windfall for the past two decades. Successive leaders of both political parties have pursued nuclear non-proliferation and counter proliferation initiatives to restore the national security enterprise as an agent for positive change.²⁹ The 2010 NSS broadly articulates American interest in redefining unwieldy legacy security arrangements the U.S. considers incompatible with the current security environment. “International institutions—most prominently NATO and the United Nations—have been at the center of our international order since the mid-20th century. Yet, an international architecture that was largely forged in the wake of World War II is buckling under the weight of new threats, making us less able to seize new opportunities...What is needed,

²⁹ The 2010 NSS recognizes the continued danger from nuclear weapons: “The gravest danger to the American people and global security continues to come from weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.” “The United States is now threatened by the potential spread of nuclear weapons to extremists who may not be deterred from using them. Instead of a hostile expansionist empire, we now face a diverse array of challenges, from a loose network of violent extremists to states that flout international norms or face internal collapse. In addition to facing enemies on traditional battlefields, the United States must now be prepared for asymmetric threats, such as those that target our reliance on space and cyberspace.” See 2010 *National Security Strategy*, pp 8 and 17.

therefore, is a realignment of national actions and international institutions with shared interests.”³⁰ Seizing ‘new opportunities’ alluded to require military capabilities that actively shape and change the global security environment, and are not merely instruments designed to deter potential adversaries and maintain the status quo.³¹ This reflects the traditional American preference shaped by classical liberal beliefs as heralded in the 2010 NSS: “When the United States encountered an ideological, economic, and military threat from communism, we shaped our practices and institutions at home—and policies abroad—to meet this challenge. Now, we must once again position the United States to champion mutual interests among nations and peoples.”³²

2) Conventionalization based on domestic pressures. Domestic pressure resulting from economic austerity has certainly forced the Defense Department to prioritize its programmatic funding advocacy, as evidenced in the decision to defer procurement of F-35 dual capability. Defense spending strain may also spur increasing calls for burdensharing in Obama administration defense policy documents that seem to revive late Cold War alliance tensions.³³ But domestic pressures compelling the DOD to pursue conventional military capabilities extend beyond fiscal realities. The loss of confidence resulting from the 2007 nuclear stewardship lapses have made arguments for NSNW force structure sustainment and extension politically difficult (as these appear to compete with appropriations to insure safety and surety). More

³⁰ Ibid, pg 40.

³¹ The 2010 NSS states, “We will continue to rebalance our military capabilities to excel at counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, stability operations, and meeting increasingly sophisticated security threats, while ensuring our force is ready to address the full range of military operations.” Ibid, pg 14.

³² Ibid, pg 9.

³³ The 2011 NMS adds to deliberate signaling efforts by explicitly warning alliance members about the U.S. sensitivity to its public perceptions on burden sharing for the expectant NATO debate leading into the NPG discussions: “NATO will remain our Nation’s preeminent multilateral alliance and continue to drive our defense relations with Europe...We will pay close *attention to how this institution adjusts to its members’ reductions in defense expenditures* to ensure the Alliance maintains the capability for full spectrum operations.” See U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2011*, (Washington, D.C., 8 February 2011), pg 14.

broadly, elected officials have been conditioned over the past two decades of military campaign successes to equate military coercive force with conventional superiority based on precision and speed. This common U.S. policy elite perception is exemplified in remarks delivered by Undersecretary of State Ellen Tauscher: “we retain the prospect of using devastating conventional force to deter and respond to any aggression, especially if they were to use chemical or biological weapons. No one should doubt our resolve to hold accountable those responsible for such aggression, whether those giving the orders or carrying them out. Deterrence depends on the credibility of response. A massive and potential conventional response to non-nuclear aggression is highly credible.”³⁴

American policy elites are comfortable with the demonstrated effectiveness of conventional military instruments after decades of military actions, while nuclear capabilities are explained to them in abstract terms ascribing theoretical effects. This post-Cold War elite conditioning underscores a shift (or lack of appreciation) in deterrent logic – the basic understanding of dissuasion based on threat of massive punishment, and not compellence through use of coercive force. These psychological forces combine to produce strong compulsion in U.S. policymakers to induce NATO to shift toward conventionalization as expressed in the NSS.

3) Generational indoctrination of the ‘nuclear taboo’. The belief in a widespread inhibition on using nuclear weapons as a global norm resulted from active U.S. and Soviet Cold War shaping influences. While this began as a realistically self-serving security arrangement, the non-proliferation norm has grown into a strategic objective independent of bipolar dissuasion

³⁴ Woolf quotes a Senate testimonial statement by the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security delivered 22 April 2010. See Amy Woolf, “Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons,” 2011, pg 24.

strategies. The theorists who informed the strategy and doctrine of the Cold War are now largely silent, and the generations of U.S. leaders since the collapse of the Soviet Union – whose formative perspective was late Cold War and the global focus on nuclear disarmament initiatives – have no individual memory of early Cold War nuclear use debates (like McNamara's described previously). The result is an American policy elite tendency to view nuclear weapons in an aggregated sense; their policy rhetoric makes no functional distinction between non-strategic and strategic nuclear weapons effects (other than simple taxonomy).³⁵ This may illuminate the U.S. inclination to seek retrenchment and relegate NSNW to the periphery in favor of rhetorical support for the strategic Triad.

IMPLICATIONS and CONCLUSION

Assessing the range of American signals against these three likely influences yields a policy coherence American elites struggle to articulate. The overall conclusion Europeans will likely reach is American leaders are attempting to set conditions for NATO to initiate the final decision to withdraw remaining NSNW from their continental forward deployed presence. The range of ambiguous signals and possible interpretations may superficially support cursory European conclusions that future alliance nuclear policy (led by the United States) is driven primarily by a series of programmatic and isolated decisions.³⁶ But the pace of U.S. actions and declarations indicate otherwise, suggesting the U.S. is grappling to effectively harness and communicate a new strategic direction that redefines European extended deterrence assurances

³⁵ The American public and policy elite aggregation of nuclear weapons was highlighted by Lieutenant General James M. Kowalski (Commander of USAF Global Strike Command) during remarks presented to the Air War College student body on 15 February, 2012. He noted that all nuclear weapons were political instruments intended solely for deterrence purposes, and never mentioned NSNW or the U.S. contribution to NATOs nuclear mission. Author's notes.

³⁶ The 2010 NPR acknowledges American signaling inconsistencies: “The United States has reduced our reliance on nuclear weapons as Cold War nuclear rivalries have eased and as our conventional military forces and missile defense capabilities have strengthened, but we have sent mixed signals about the importance we place on nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.” See U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, (Washington, D.C., 06 April 2010), pg 5.

using a mix of conventional and strategic nuclear capabilities. The most powerful and consistent thread through all the signals examined in the second section is the American perception of a changed threat environment; this belief is underscored in all policy documents and used to justify rhetorical statements and programmatic decisions. The unintended effect of an American belief in the reduced efficacy of nuclear weapons for all but existential threat deterrence is a loss in commitment perception. This has caused the beginning of a reexamination of core alliance functions, potentially undermining the strength of consultative norms and shared purpose.

U.S. and European Alliance leaders are at an important transition point between a past period of equilibrium defined by a shared understanding of extended deterrence dynamics, and a desired future period of equilibrium founded on a new cooperative security paradigm. The range of mixed signals reflect the absence of a centrally guiding theoretical construct – a shared narrative among U.S. policy elites they are able to use to clearly articulate the evolving role of nuclear weapons in America’s security commitments to NATO members. The absence of a shared security narrative to effectively signal intentions is compounded by the reflexively conditioned American desire to seek alliance consensus through consultation. The deferential policy posture expressed in the NSS likely reflects the generational inculcation of U.S. policy-makers on the principle that American alliance leadership was cemented through the earnest consultation of its component members, who would accede to U.S. strategic initiatives only if they recognized “that their basic interests were recognized by the leader and served by the coalition.”³⁷ Thomas Risse-Kappan’s research reveals that even when Americans disagreed with or were unable to consult prior to action in time of crisis, U.S. policy elites were conditioned to

³⁷ Dean Acheson’s notions describing what he termed a “pattern of responsibility” paraphrased in John L. Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pg 280.

consider European preferences and points of view.³⁸ Americans today remain convinced that they hold European security concerns as equal to their own. This elite conditioning may explain why U.S. principals remain publically uncommitted to NATO strategy deliberations and at the same time actively reassessing American nuclear posture and policy.

The American ability to express a unifying theoretical vision for any future security paradigm is absolutely vital for U.S. alliance leadership, European policy elite support, and by logical extension, the future strength of NATO alliance as it faces this transition period. The alliance will doubtless evolve following its first meaningful post-Cold War debate of ideas, but will retain its privileged place as the premier international model of lasting security cooperation. The remarkable European internalization of American democratic idealism has been counterbalanced by the U.S. embrace of entangling institutions and influence networks since the end of World War II. Thus, “if the Western Alliance is based primarily on shared values, norms, and a collective identity rather than on the perception of a common threat, one should expect the transatlantic security community to persist in one institutionalized form or another.”³⁹

³⁸ In his examples of the Cuban missile crisis and Korean War, Risso-Kappan examines the establishment of allied consultation norms governing the use of nuclear weapons. “The evidence reveals that the administration was well aware of allied opposition, and that the alliance argument figured prominently in the internal considerations.” See Thomas Risso-Kappan, *Cooperation Among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pg 65.

³⁹ Ibid, pg 195.

APPENDIX

Subjective coding assessment of European perceptions to U.S. signaling activities

	Inducements and Reassurance (1)	Adds Crisis Stability (2)	Decreases credibility (limited/unusable capabilities) (3)	Solely domestic pressures (4)	Decreases political commitment (5)
Formal U.S. policy reprioritization	-			-	-
Distance 'first use' caveat	+/-	+	-		-
U.S. rhetoric relying on STRATFOR	+/-	+	0	0	-
DCA modernization debate	0		-	0	+
B-61 SLEP advocacy	+		+	0	-
NSNW arms control	+/-	+		0	-
Coding	+3 / -4	+3	-1	-1	-4
Overall assessment: New NATO members strongly negative(-10); Founding members (0)					

Notes:

1. Steven Larsen recaps the historical rationale of European NSNW, "...to ensure coupling and a seamless web of deterrence based on an escalatory ladder, from conventional forces to tactical nuclear weapons to U.S. strategic forces based at sea and in North America. This alternative [sole reliance on CONUS STRATFOR] would require a new level of reassurance to allies that have grown to expect that middle rung of the escalatory ladder to remain in place in Europe." See Jeffrey A. Larsen, "Future Options for NATO Nuclear Policy," pg 6. The division between some alliance members who still seek this reassurance based on their characterization of contemporary Russian military threat is captured in the bifurcation of this column's coding.

2. Crisis stability is believed to increase if a state (or alliance) takes measures that make mobilization of nuclear forces more difficult or transparent, and/or by decreasing alert postures. U.S. deliberations contemplating removal of NSNW and DCA and reliance on strategic forces incorporates this perspective (especially if CONUS based bombers are used to signal increased alert postures by posturing them forward to European host installations). See Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), pg 56. Western European perceptions of NSNW impact on crisis stability trace their origin to late Cold War concerns that lower-yield nuclear weapons would somehow breach the moral and psychological ‘firebreak’ between an escalating conventional conflict and a nuclear exchange. See Michael T. Klare, “Breaching the Firebreak,” in *The Nuclear Reader: Strategy, Weapons, War, 2nd edition*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), pg 191.

3. An effective threat is manifested by developing military capability that is known or perceived by an adversary, and communicating a believable intent to use it if challenged. Steven Pifer explains, “The credibility of the U.S. nuclear presence depends in part on militarily viable delivery systems. Weapons that can only sit in storage vaults do not make for an effective deterrent. See Steven Pifer, et al. “U.S. and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges,” pg 21.

4. Western Europeans may conditionally perceive the internal American nuclear force posture debate as solely intended for domestic consumption, and discount these as unintended signals, based on historical consultative norms. The 0 coding reflects the highly subjective nature of domestic debates on international perceptions.

5. The critical connection between capability and threat believability (credibility) is typically projected and interpreted through the prism of commitment – actors endeavor to convince others of their willingness to pay a high price to defend their interests against challengers. Actors commit themselves through physical linkages (by exposing territory, resources, or treasure) and express commitment diplomatically by staking reputation, increasing their own political costs if they demur. The concept of ‘extended deterrence’ seeks to project a defender’s believable commitment to partner actors. Theorist Patrick Morgan suggests, “Extended general deterrence may be discounted by opponents because the commitment is not clear...or because its connection to a particular case is not readily apparent” See Patrick M Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pg 84.

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